



# *Pride & Prejudice*

*By Jane Austen*



## *Jane Austen (1775 - 1817)*

*Jane Austen was an English novelist whose books, set among the English middle and upper classes, are notable for their wit, social observation and insights into the lives of early 19th century women.*

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 in the village of Steventon in Hampshire. She was one of eight children of a clergyman and grew up in a close-knit family. She began to write as a teenager. In 1801 the family moved to Bath. After the death of Jane's father in 1805 Jane, her sister Cassandra and their mother moved several times eventually settling in Chawton, near Steventon.

Jane's brother Henry helped her negotiate with a publisher and her first novel, 'Sense and Sensibility', appeared in 1811. Her next novel 'Pride and Prejudice', which she described as her "own darling child" received highly favourable reviews. 'Mansfield Park' was published in 1814, then 'Emma' in 1816. 'Emma' was dedicated to the prince regent, an admirer of her work. All of Jane Austen's novels were published anonymously. In 1816, Jane began to suffer from ill-health, probably due to Addison's disease. She travelled to Winchester to receive treatment, and died there on 18 July 1817. Two more novels, 'Persuasion' and 'Northanger Abbey' were published posthumously and a final novel was left incomplete.

# *Pride and Prejudice*

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- *Pride and Prejudice* was written between October 1796 and August 1797; it was Austen's first novel and most famous work.
- It was not published, however, until 1813, two years after *Sense and Sensibility*.
- Austen other novels are *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*.

## *England 1795-1815*

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- Austen's major novels, including *Pride and Prejudice*, were all composed within a short 20 year period.
- Those 20 years also mark a period in history when England was at the height of its power and were still enjoying great military victories over Napoleon and the French.

# *Social Class*

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- England was *extremely stratified*, and class divisions were rooted in family connections and wealth.
- Social mobility was limited (yet becoming increasingly doable for a middle-class citizen) and class-consciousness was strong
- Social class and its implications are overwhelmingly present in *Pride and Prejudice*.
- In her work, Austen clearly intends to undermine all of the class distinctions. But while her social attitudes may be progressive, they are not revolutionary.

# *Gender*

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- Ideas of socially appropriate behavior for men and women were very clear.
- Social advancement for young men was found in the military, church, or law
- Women could only accomplish this through marriage
- Following the example of their leader George IV, a man known for his lack of morals, young men regularly went to universities not to learn but to see and be seen, to drink, gamble, race horses and spend money.
- Women were generally uneducated, leaving them little choice but to find a husband for their own social and economic survival.

# *Pride and Prejudice*

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“It is truth acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”



# *Women in the 19th Century*

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- Marriage was a central concern in the early nineteenth century because it involved the social continuance of the family line through inherited property and was the only chance for middle and upper-class women to have a tolerable existence.
- Law, education, and custom closed off many possible avenues of advancement for women
- Men ruled the public world of politics and business; women ruled the home.

# *Women in the 19th Century*

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- Rigid guidelines dictated the lives of respectable married women
  - They never went out alone (especially not in the city and not at night)
  - They spent their days supervising servants
  - They did needlepoint
  - They made or received visits
  - They thought of little besides fashion and society
- Married women could not own property, including that which they might have inherited or earned after the wedding.
- Husbands were under no obligation to will their estates to their wives
- If a husband died without a will, his widow had little claim to any of the property

# *Women in the 19th Century*

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- Unmarried women of good birth had an even more difficult time
  - They could only rarely inherit property
  - Most fortunes were willed to eldest son
  - As in the case with the Bennet family, great estates were frequently “entailed” on the male line, so that in the absence of sons, some distant relative would inherit a man’s property
- No matter how elevated her background, a penniless young woman who did not marry was often forced to live with married sisters or live on a meager income.
  - Treated as a servant
  - Only careers as governesses or school teachers
  - Required to care for infants or do the sewing
  - These girls in the highest ranks were forced to earn their living

# *Women's Accomplishments*

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- In Austen's day, the daughters of middle and upper class could be sent to school, but their education consisted more of becoming "accomplished" than it did of expanding their academic knowledge. It was meant to attract a man. These skills tended to be neglected after marriage.
  - Reading
  - Playing a musical instrument
  - Singing
  - Drawing
  - Speak modern languages (generally Italian or French)

# *Entailments*

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- An entail was a legal device to prevent landing property from being broken up or from descending into the female line
  - Leaving the bulk of one's wealth
  - Darcy received 10,000 a year (representing a wealth of 200,000 while his sister has 30,000)
  - Bingley has 100,000 and his two sisters 20,000 a piece)

## *And the story goes...*

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- Mrs. Bennet's overriding concern with the marriages of her five daughters is thus typical of the panic many 19th century mothers felt (shocking).
- Mr. Bennet had entailed his estate to his distant cousin
- A single man, Charles Bingley, has leased Netherfield Park and his best friend is Fitzwilliam Darcy
  - Possibility for the middle class Bennet girls to catch a man
    - Jane
    - Elizabeth
    - Mary
    - Catherine (Kitty)
    - Lydia

# *Setting*

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- The story takes place in a series of small villages in England at the close of the 18th century
- The novel opens in the Bennet home in the village of Longbourn, located about a mile from Meryton, the nearest town
- Chapter 3 takes place at Netherfield Park, Bingley's rented estate
- The setting alternates between Longbourn and Netherfield Park with occasional mention of other various locations

# *Subjects into Themes*

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- Marriage
- Good Breeding
- Pride and Prejudice
  - Appearances
  - Social Rank
  - Happiness



## *Some Literary Techniques*

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- Satire: writing that ridicules or holds up to contempt the faults of individuals or groups.
- Irony: technique that involves surprising, interesting, or amusing contradictions
- Humor: writing that amuses and entertains (Austen uses satire and irony)

## *Form and Structure*

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- Satire on life in a small village in southern England at the close of the 18th century.
- Novel of manners: “business of getting married”
- Action takes place within 14 months (from early autumn to right before Christmas) 1811-1812.
- Sixty-one chapters divided into three volumes
- Most of the novel is told in third-person point of view, but switches to first person for sense of closure

# *Pride and Prejudice's characters*



# *Elizabeth Bennet*

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- The second daughter in the Bennet family, and the most intelligent and quick-witted, Elizabeth is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and one of the most well-known female characters in English literature. Her admirable qualities are numerous—she is lovely, clever, and, in a novel defined by dialogue, she converses as brilliantly as anyone. Her honesty, virtue, and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and bad behavior that pervade her class-bound and often spiteful society. Nevertheless, her sharp tongue and tendency to make hasty judgments often lead her astray; *Pride and Prejudice* is essentially the story of how she (and her true love, Darcy) overcome all obstacles—including their own personal failings—to find romantic happiness. Elizabeth must not only cope with a hopeless mother, a distant father, two badly behaved younger siblings, and several snobbish, antagonizing females, she must also overcome her own mistaken impressions of Darcy, which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. Her charms are sufficient to keep him interested, fortunately, while she navigates familial and social turmoil. As she gradually comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy's character, she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him.

# *Fitzwilliam Darcy*

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- The son of a wealthy, well-established family and the master of the great estate of Pemberley, Darcy is Elizabeth's male counterpart. The narrator relates Elizabeth's point of view of events more often than Darcy's, so Elizabeth often seems a more sympathetic figure. The reader eventually realizes, however, that Darcy is her ideal match. Intelligent and forthright, he too has a tendency to judge too hastily and harshly, and his high birth and wealth make him overly proud and overly conscious of his social status. Indeed, his haughtiness makes him initially bungle his courtship. When he proposes to her, for instance, he dwells more on how unsuitable a match she is than on her charms, beauty, or anything else complimentary. Her rejection of his advances builds a kind of humility in him. Darcy demonstrates his continued devotion to Elizabeth, in spite of his distaste for her low connections, when he rescues Lydia and the entire Bennet family from disgrace, and when he goes against the wishes of his haughty aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by continuing to pursue Elizabeth. Darcy proves himself worthy of Elizabeth, and she ends up repenting her earlier, overly harsh judgment of him.

# *Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley*

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- Elizabeth's beautiful elder sister and Darcy's wealthy best friend, Jane and Bingley engage in a courtship that occupies a central place in the novel. They first meet at the ball in Meryton and enjoy an immediate mutual attraction. They are spoken of as a potential couple throughout the book, long before anyone imagines that Darcy and Elizabeth might marry. Despite their centrality to the narrative, they are vague characters, sketched by Austen rather than carefully drawn. Indeed, they are so similar in nature and behavior that they can be described together: both are cheerful, friendly, and good-natured, always ready to think the best of others; they lack entirely the prickly egotism of Elizabeth and Darcy. Jane's gentle spirit serves as a foil for her sister's fiery, contentious nature, while Bingley's eager friendliness contrasts with Darcy's stiff pride. Their principal characteristics are goodwill and compatibility, and the contrast of their romance with that of Darcy and Elizabeth is remarkable. Jane and Bingley exhibit to the reader true love unhampered by either pride or prejudice, though in their simple goodness, they also demonstrate that such a love is mildly dull.

***Mr. Bennet*** - The patriarch of the Bennet family, a gentleman of modest income with five unmarried daughters. Mr. Bennet has a sarcastic, cynical sense of humor that he uses to purposefully irritate his wife. Though he loves his daughters (Elizabeth in particular), he often fails as a parent, preferring to withdraw from the never-ending marriage concerns of the women around him rather than offer help.

***Mrs. Bennet*** - Mr. Bennet's wife, a foolish, noisy woman whose only goal in life is to see her daughters married. Because of her low breeding and often unbecoming behavior, Mrs. Bennet often repels the very suitors whom she tries to attract for her daughters.

***George Wickham*** - A handsome, fortune-hunting militia officer. Wickham's good looks and charm attract Elizabeth initially, but Darcy's revelation about Wickham's disreputable past clues her in to his true nature and simultaneously draws her closer to Darcy.

## *Lydia Bennet*

### Characters Lydia Bennet

Lydia is the youngest and wildest Bennet daughter. She is her mother's favorite because like Mrs. Bennet, she is preoccupied with gossip, socializing, and men. Lydia is described as having "high animal spirits and a sort of natural self-consequence." She is attractive and charismatic, but she is also reckless and impulsive. Lydia's behavior frequently embarrasses her older sisters, and when Lydia receives the invitation to go to Brighton, Lizzy makes an impassioned speech about her sister's character. She explains that "our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character" Lizzie also articulates her fear that Lydia is on the road to becoming "a flirt in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation." Lydia has an innate tendency toward wild and selfish behavior, but as a character she also sheds light on the failings of her parents, and father in particular. Because of her young age and lack of education, Lydia is presented as not entirely culpable for her behavior because she lacks parental guidance and discipline.



**Mr. Collins** - A pompous, generally idiotic clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet's property. Mr. Collins's own social status is nothing to brag about, but he takes great pains to let everyone and anyone know that Lady Catherine de Bourgh serves as his patroness. He is the worst combination of snobbish and obsequious.

**Miss Bingley** - Bingley's snobbish sister. Miss Bingley bears inordinate disdain for Elizabeth's middle-class background. Her vain attempts to garner Darcy's attention cause Darcy to admire Elizabeth's self-possessed character even more.

**Lady Catherine de Bourgh** - A rich, bossy noblewoman; Mr. Collins's patron and Darcy's aunt. Lady Catherine epitomizes class snobbery, especially in her attempts to order the middle-class Elizabeth away from her well-bred nephew.

**Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner** - Mrs. Bennet's brother and his wife. The Gardiners, caring, nurturing, and full of common sense, often prove to be better parents to the Bennet daughters than Mr. Bennet and his wife.

**Charlotte Lucas** - Elizabeth's dear friend. Pragmatic where Elizabeth is romantic, and also six years older than Elizabeth, Charlotte does not view love as the most vital component of a marriage. She is more interested in having a comfortable home. Thus, when Mr. Collins proposes, she accepts.

***Georgiana Darcy*** - Darcy's sister. She is immensely pretty and just as shy. She has great skill at playing the pianoforte.

***Mary Bennet*** - The middle Bennet sister, bookish and pedantic.

***Catherine Bennet*** - The fourth Bennet sister. Like Lydia, she is girlishly enthralled with the soldiers.